

# Addressing knowledge and capacity gaps to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems

Highlights from the final evaluation of the Centre of Excellence for CRVS

## WHY CRVS KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY MATTER

Many low- and middle- income countries do not have well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems (1). Yet, CRVS systems help countries build a data infrastructure to protect everyone throughout the life-course, from birth to death, including marriage and divorce. Civil registration gives people proof of their legal identity, age, and social relationships, enabling them to access public services and social protection. Vital statistics provide real-time data that can be used to design health and social policies. The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems was created precisely in response to the global need for leadership, evidence, and standards to support countries working to advance their CRVS capacity.

## ABOUT THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CRVS SYSTEMS

Housed at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa, Canada, the **Centre of Excellence (CoE) for CRVS Systems** is a global knowledge hub working to develop, strengthen, and scale up CRVS systems that protect and count everyone, especially women and girls. The CoE collaborates with organizations and experts to broker access to CRVS information, including global standards, tools, research evidence, and good practices. The CoE is funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and IDRC (\$16m CAD budget) and has a mandate spanning December 2015 to July 2021. Their efforts contribute directly to the work of the Global Financing Facility (GFF), a key financing platform of the UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health.

## ABOUT THE EVALUATION

In early 2020, the CoE commissioned Cathexis Consulting to conduct a final evaluation of the CoE's first five years (2). The evaluation focused on the CoE's outcomes, strategies, and potential for scalability and sustainability. As an early step in the process, Cathexis reviewed approximately 150 project documents and analyzed monitoring data. Following this, Cathexis conducted 44 interviews with CoE staff, key program partners, national CRVS implementers, and regional-global stakeholders.

**This brief provides an overview of the findings from the final evaluation pertaining to the CoE's work in contributing to CRVS thought leadership, research, knowledge generation, and capacity strengthening as well as the success of the CoE in establishing itself in the CRVS field.**

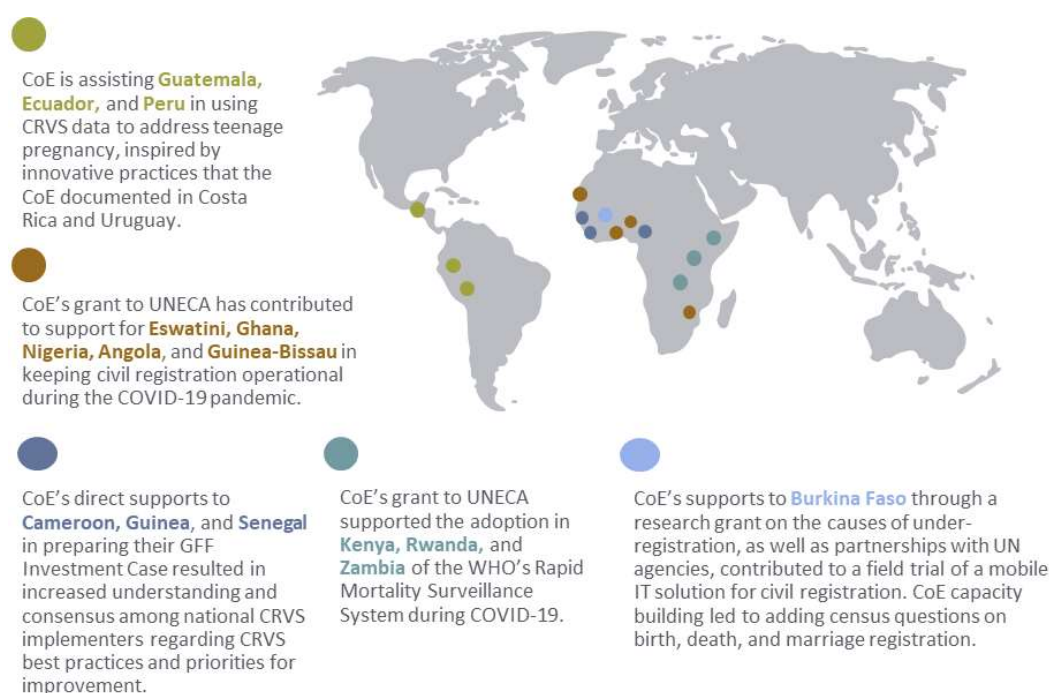
## Supporting countries in strengthening CRVS systems

The CoE provides country-level technical assistance to selected low- and middle- income countries (see **Figure 1**). For instance, the CoE is providing direct support to governments and stakeholders in Guinea, Cameroon, and Senegal to develop and implement CRVS components of Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) investment cases. This has resulted in an increased understanding and consensus among national CRVS implementers on CRVS best practices and priorities for improvement.

To support more countries to strengthen CRVS systems, the CoE put in place innovative mechanisms such as the UN Population Data Fellows program within the Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality (ConVERGE) partnership. Furthermore, through a partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), a consultant was recruited to provide direct CRVS technical support to African countries.

Stakeholders highly appreciate the CoE's country-level assistance activities. One stakeholder shared: "I would love to see... more direct, on-the-ground support and assistance. Going into the country, doing analysis, then translating that analysis bit into 'what do we do about it?'... Linking the research and analysis side with the technical operational side is critical." Another stakeholder emphasized the importance of having people that know about CRVS at the CoE. "One good thing the CoE did," said the stakeholder, "is bring people who were working in the CRVS field already at the global or national level, and brought them to the CoE to support countries. Having real expertise on CRVS helps make an impact."

**Figure 1: Examples of country-level technical assistance**



## Producing and sharing CRVS knowledge



*We are inspired by [the CoE's] reports. They reveal how other countries have strengthened their CRVS systems, and we capitalize on these experiences.... By this exchange, we are aware of the most recent knowledge, tools, and approaches.* — National CRVS implementer

One of the CoE's most notable contributions to the CRVS field has been through high-quality knowledge production and sharing efforts. CoE stakeholders have especially appreciated the CoE's online resource library, country profiles, and knowledge sharing. These efforts are geared towards sharing new knowledge in the field, spreading good practices, and creating opportunities for peer-learning and cross-country strategizing to fill CRVS capacity gaps.



**CRVS knowledge sharing.** The CoE produced several high-quality knowledge products touching on different aspects of CRVS systems. For instance, the CoE worked with UNECA to understand the COVID-19/CRVS connection in Africa through a survey of government responses to COVID-19. The results led to recommendations to African governments on how to continue registering births and deaths and producing vital statistics during the pandemic. This partnership also supported 2 [webinar series](#) on COVID-19 and CRVS and 12 [technical briefs on good practices in maintaining CRVS systems](#).



**Online resource library.** The CoE's library is intended to be a 'one-stop shop' for CRVS knowledge products. The volume of resources available has steadily increased, from **188** in 2017-18 to **260** in 2019-20. According to one stakeholder, "When you want to know something about CRVS in a specific area, you go there." Stakeholders have appreciated that the resources are designed to be used: "Because the Centre is investing in research that has direct relevance and can be applied, the results are directly usable. They are not theoretical... [they] are having a direct impact on the use of best practices."



**CRVS country profiles.** The CoE's country profiles are concise overviews of a country's CRVS system, including CRVS dimensions, legislation, institutions, and degree of digitization. The CoE has created or commissioned 47 CRVS country profiles, contributing to "evidence-based knowledge to use by countries, international organizations, or regional partners to try to strengthen CRVS around the world." The country profiles can be accessed via an [interactive map](#).

### Examples of CoE knowledge production

In partnership with Open Data Watch, the CoE developed three series of [knowledge briefs on gender and CRVS](#), which were the most popular downloads to-date. These series aim to uncover gender bias, share case studies, and recommend solutions, helping to promote the adoption of good CRVS practices among stakeholders.

Also with Open Data Watch, the CoE developed the [Compendium of Good Practices: Harnessing Civil Registration and Vital Statistics \(CRVS\) Systems in Conflict, Emergencies, and Fragile Settings](#). This compendium highlights successful experiences in building effective CRVS systems in conflict, emergency, and fragile contexts to ensure those most in need are counted and can access services.

The 4<sup>th</sup> most popular download was the [Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems](#), developed with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD). This compendium explores how countries can adopt a holistic approach to CRVS and identify management.

The CoE developed a compendium titled '[The Nexus Between Civil Registration and Social Protection Systems: Five Country Practices](#)', which highlights the efforts over time of five countries to improve public sector service delivery based on universal civil registration.

For the full list of all publications of the CoE, see the CoE's [CRVS publications and resource catalogue](#).

## Building the next generation of CRVS experts

Advancing the CRVS field requires effort to train and mentor CRVS professionals. The CoE has taken up this activity using a multi-pronged strategy to improve CRVS capacity and promote access to CRVS expertise:

- **Directory of Experts.** Through an [online platform](#) where experts can list their qualifications and experience, the CoE is connecting governments, practitioners, and experts from across the global CRVS community. The Directory also includes job listings, calls for proposals, training opportunities, and information about CRVS events, enabling it to function as a network. Stakeholders reported they have used the Directory to find consultants.
- **CRVS Research Fellows program.** The CoE supported the creation of a CRVS fellowship hosted at the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. Eight research fellows were

selected following a rigorous process and were mentored for two years. The objective was to build a new generation of CRVS experts. These fellows are relatively early career (graduate students, postdocs, or new assistant professors) and are from Malaysia, Peru, Uganda, Italy, Iran, Bangladesh, and India.

- **UN Population Data Fellows program.** Twelve early career professionals received an 18-month fellowship to develop hands-on training in gender-sensitive vital statistics collection and analysis. Following training, fellows were deployed to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) headquarters or a UNFPA regional/country office and were provided additional workshops and ongoing mentoring. The fellows provided technical assistance to governments in compiling, analyzing, and using vital statistics even when there is incomplete registration, or supported other related CRVS issues (e.g. social change, CRVS business processes).
- **Global CRVS eLearning course.** The CoE also contributed to an [eLearning course](#) designed to acquaint professionals with CRVS systems. It is available free of charge in French and English through the World Bank's online Open Learning Campus.

## Growing credibility and reputation as a CRVS partner



*They've set themselves up well, and formed a good foundation as the 'go-to' place. — Core partner*

The CoE has become known as a partner to other organizations working on various CRVS issues. In partnership with UNFPA, the CoE developed ConVERGE, a CAD \$3.2 million initiative aiming to improve the collection of gender-disaggregated vital statistics. The CoE's work with UNECA provided direct CRVS technical support to African countries. The [Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and Identity Management Systems](#), developed with UNFPA and the GPSDD, was among one the knowledge products which stakeholders reported using most.

The CoE worked with UNICEF and WHO for the first CRVS innovations conference, as well as UNFPA and Open Data Watch on the ConVERGE conference. Furthermore, the CoE has partnered with other organizations on conferences, colloquium, and workshops, and brings CRVS expertise to its partnerships. According to one partner, “The staff are very, very knowledgeable about CRVS and have enormous credibility and field experience around the world.”

## Advancing specialized CRVS knowledge

The CoE has taken up a role as a specialist in CRVS in certain settings and sub-topics. Many stakeholders have recognized the CoE's leadership in the realm of CRVS and gender and protection of disadvantaged populations. Stakeholders also recognize the CoE as a leader in advancing vital statistics from incomplete data; CRVS and identity management; and CRVS in conflicts, emergencies, and fragile settings. Given its growing reputation in these areas, the CoE is poised to continue occupying these niches.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The CoE's stakeholders who were consulted for the final evaluation (including international CRVS implementors and implementing and funding partners) agreed that the CoE is an internationally recognized hub for CRVS knowledge and a key organizational actor in the CRVS field. Many of these stakeholders pointed out the CoE's knowledge products, knowledge sharing events, and networking opportunities for being high quality and useful.

COVID-19 has posed a threat to CRVS systems—particularly around practical and logistical challenges in implementing CRVS systems—highlighting a continued need for the work of the CoE. During a crisis like COVID-19, the CoE’s advocacy and support for well-functioning CRVS systems is essential for ensuring the availability of reliable and timely mortality statistics for informing public health responses.

To ensure health and well-being for all, stakeholders urge the CoE to build on what has worked in the past and use what has been learned in its brief tenure. Keeping the CoE’s momentum going will be critical for sustaining and expanding the CoE’s success.

Looking forward, the CoE’s stakeholders want to see the CoE and CRVS leaders address the following knowledge and capacity gaps in the CRVS field:

- **Continue to commission and produce original high quality CRVS research.** Maintain an implementation-oriented and demand-driven approach.
- **Continue to act as a thought leader, including in the gender arena and in the intersections between COVID-19 and CRVS.** Continue developing gender-responsive resources and training, as well as drawing links between CRVS and other emerging priorities.
- **Explore possibilities for showing thought leadership in neglected registration areas:** adoption, recognition, and legitimation.
- **Continue to emphasize South-South knowledge exchange** by documenting promising CRVS practices from around the world and sharing them in the CoE’s Resource Library and elsewhere.
- **Promote the CoE’s Resource Library more actively among the stakeholder network.** Continue to improve the Resource Library’s organization, structure, and user interface.
- **Continue to invest in the CoE’s Directory of Experts.** Improve the platform by adding experts, upskilling existing experts, and nurturing new ones.
- **Continue to extend supports to individual countries both directly from CoE staff and indirectly through strategic partnerships.** As the CoE is a team of only four staff, working with partners is important for meeting global CRVS knowledge and training needs.
- **Offer more guidance to countries on technological aspects of CRVS,** including protecting against the misuse of CRVS data. Collaborating with partners will help support the implementation of this recommendation.

This brief was written by Cathexis Consulting Inc. It was part of the final evaluation of the Centre of Excellence for CRVS (for the full evaluation report, see Cathexis Consulting, 2021). Financial and technical assistance was provided by the Centre of Excellence. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre of Excellence.

## REFERENCES

1. Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. (n.d.). Why CRVS systems matter. Available from: <https://crvssystems.ca/why-crvs-systems-matter>
2. Cathexis Consulting. (2021). Final evaluation of the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems. IDRC. Ottawa, ON. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10625/59814>